

# The Capital Arundel Report

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## Kent Island low-income housing project nixed

### Commissioners seek private builder for affordable homes

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In response to public opposition, Queen Anne's County commissioners have killed a proposal to build a low-income housing project on Kent Island.

The Dec. 18 decision nixes 108 apartment units planned on county-owned property off Cox Neck Road that would have helped meet the backlog of low-income housing needs in the county.

Instead of moving ahead with the apartments, the county Board of Commissioners decided to turn to the private sector. They will seek offers from builders interested in developing affordable housing to be sold rather than leased on the 16-acre site.

"We are putting out a request for information to determine if a private developer would be able to build, if

they got the land for free," County Commission President Eric Wargotz said. Giving the land to the builder should keep residences affordable.

He added the commissioners hope a developer would be able to build suitable housing on the property to help address the needs of the working class.

With a backlog of some 350 people awaiting housing help, the county had planned on building 108 two- and three-bedroom apartments next to 24 townhouses currently occupied by the community's poor.

The plan dates back to the 1980s, but was finally brought forward in March when funding for preliminary planning on the project was approved.

But the public was concerned about the idea of concentrating that many families in a small area. Residents, es-

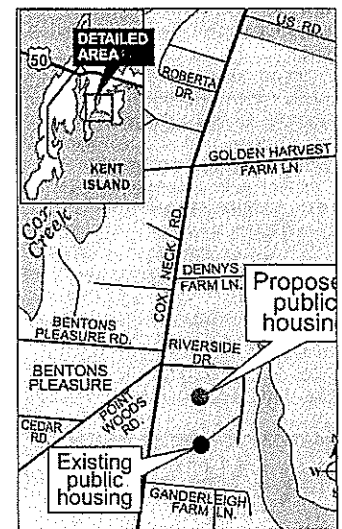
pecially those living near the proposed site off Riverside Drive about 1.5 miles south of Route 50 in Chester, complained that current drug and crime problems associated with the present facilities would be exacerbated.

At a handful of public meetings, residents also pointed to increased traffic and unintended consequences like opening up undeveloped land along Cox Neck Road if water lines were extended to the project site.

Former commissioner Michael Koval, who lives across Cox Neck Road in the Benton's Pleasure community, was against the original plan and was glad to see the commissioners act upon the public input.

"It's good news. It looks pretty good if they do what they say they are going

(See HOUSING, Page B2)



Capital graphic

## HOUSING

(Continued from Page B1)

to do," Mr. Koval said yesterday.

But what the commissioners acted on at their meeting seems to differ, depending on who you talk to.

Two motions were made — one to nix the 108-unit project, and another to seek input from private developers.

The commissioners were presented with five alternatives to the original housing plan, including lower density, senior housing, mixed income hous-

ing, an assisted living facility or 14 single-family homes.

All the alternatives, except the single-family homes and assisted living ideas, involve significant county investment ranging from \$1.5 to \$2 million.

"In the current environment, we don't feel county government can contribute at that level. It's not the most appropriate use of tax dollars," Mr. Wargotz said.

Turning to private enterprise closely resembles the single-family home proposal to some.

Mr. Koval and others who attended the meeting thought the commissioners chose a 14-home alternative.

"It is not restricted to single-family homes, and not to 14," Mr. Wargotz said. "It could be some single-family, as well as some multi-family dwellings."

He said it seemed the 14-home proposal did not meet the demand for low or affordable housing.

"It has to work for developers as well. We have a goal in mind. We need to try and address the demand for affordable housing (at the site) ... That is why the land was purchased."

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